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# From language maintenance to bilingual parenting: Negotiating behavior and language choice at the dinner table in binational-bilingual families

**Abstract:** This article contributes to the study of language maintenance as an everyday activity in binational-bilingual families. By embedding the question of language maintenance into a language socialization framework and adopting a conversation-analytic approach to language alternation, three excerpts of mealtime interactions in Russian–French speaking families are analyzed. Their analysis shows that in bilingual families situations focusing on the interactional definition and negotiation of children’s behavior simultaneously involve the negotiation of language choice. It reveals how parents in binational-bilingual families accomplish bilingual (language) socialization in daily practice while dealing with the complex task of combining educational goals with language maintenance.

**Keywords:** binational families, bilingual parenting, language socialization, mealtime interaction, language maintenance

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## 1 Introduction

Traditional research on language maintenance usually focuses on the acquisition, transmission, and use of a minority language. Adopting a macro-social correlational framework, it neglects the fact that language maintenance is actually achieved within everyday interaction and that it takes place in a bi/multilingual setting. In this paper, I will argue that language maintenance should be approached within a language socialization framework, which considers language acquisition as embedded in the process of socialization into becoming a competent member of a group (Schieffelin & Ochs 1986; Ochs & Schieffelin 2008). This approach puts an emphasis on a close analysis of interactional

details, while considering language acquisition and maintenance as embedded in everyday activities.

Further, I will show that language maintenance is not only a question of the transmission of a minority language, but of combining two (or more) languages in everyday life (Grosjean 1982; Lüdi & Py 2009). This applies in particular to the binational-bilingual families studied in this volume, for whom language choice is a part of all everyday activities and routines (Piller 2002; Lindenfeld & Varro 2008). Even if many bilingual families do make a conscious choice about who uses which language with whom, thus establishing a ‘family language policy’ (Schwartz 2010) or ‘private language planning’ (Piller 2001), parents in a bilingual setting are not only concerned with their children’s language acquisition, but also their upbringing and education.

The present study contributes to research on language maintenance by analyzing bilingual language use in mealtime interactions within binational-bilingual families composed of a Russian and a French speaking partner living in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. It presents a detailed sequential analysis showing how the participants deal with the definition and negotiation of behavioral norms, while simultaneously attending to interactional needs and negotiating language choice (Auer 1984; Gafaranga 2005). The analysis reveals how parents in binational-bilingual families, while dealing with the complex task of combining educational goals with language maintenance, accomplish bilingual (language) socialization in daily practice.

## 2 Research background

Many Western European countries show a progressively multinational and multilingual demographic composition, with binational marriages no longer being a rarity (see the contributions to this issue). This reality notwithstanding, there has been relatively little research on language maintenance in such families (but see Varro 1995; Lanza 1998; Stoessel 2002) in comparison to research on larger immigrant communities or national minorities (see overview in García 2003).

The present paper is situated within a larger research project,<sup>1</sup> which investigates language maintenance and multilingual practices within binational-

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<sup>1</sup> The project (my PhD thesis) is part of the research group ‘Multilingualism in social and vocational settings’ within the graduate program Pro\*Doc ‘Language as social and cultural practice’ (2008–2011) funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation ([www.snf.ch](http://www.snf.ch)).

bilingual couples and families in Switzerland, while focusing on families composed of a Russian and a French speaking partner living in the French speaking part of Switzerland.

In 2009, 35.8 percent of all marriages contracted in Switzerland were between a foreign and a Swiss partner (BFS 2010a). While Russian speakers (here: Russian and Ukrainian nationals<sup>2</sup>) constituted only about 1 percent of the foreign resident population in Switzerland in 2009, their absolute number had doubled since 2000 (BFS 2010b). Female Russian and Ukrainian nationals ranked 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> respectively in the Top Ten of binational marriages to Swiss nationals in 2007 (BFS 2009).

### 3 Theoretical background

Language maintenance has traditionally been studied in relation to macro-sociological factors with a focus on larger minority or immigrant communities (Fishman 1966; García 2003). Children's bilingual language acquisition, on the other hand, has mostly been investigated within psycholinguistic frameworks, focusing on the form and frequency of parental linguistic input in the respective languages (De Houwer 2011).

This paper argues that the language socialization framework offers a more promising approach to the study of language maintenance in bilingual families. Based on recorded bilingual family mealtime interactions, it proposes an interactional micro-perspective on language maintenance, adopting a conversation-analytic approach to bilingual conversation.

#### 3.1 The language socialization framework and the study of language maintenance

The language socialization approach has brought new insights into the study of language acquisition arguing 'that the process of acquiring language is embedded in and constitutive of the process of becoming socialized to be a competent member of a social group' (Ochs & Schieffelin 1984: 5). It conceives of language acquisition as an interactional process embedded in everyday com-

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<sup>2</sup> There are no recent statistics on the languages spoken by the foreign resident population in Switzerland. Therefore, I have to make approximations based on the available statistics about citizenship.

municative practices (Schieffelin & Ochs 1986; Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez 2002; Ochs & Schieffelin 2008).

Originally, language socialization studies examined relatively homogeneous and monolingual communities (Ochs & Schieffelin 1984), but recent developments in the field have increasingly shifted the focus towards bi- or multilingual settings linked to traditional societal bilingualism (Kulick 1992; Garrett 2005) as well as immigrant language contexts (Schieffelin 1993; Bayley & Schecter 2003). Nevertheless, the language socialization framework has rarely been used in studies of bilingual-binational families (but see Lanza 2005).

In this paper, I argue that language maintenance in such families can be studied as a form of bilingual (language) socialization where ‘socialization through the use of language and socialization to use language’ (Schieffelin & Ochs 1986: 163) becomes socialization through the use of two (or more) languages and socialization to use two (or more) languages.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.2 Language socialization and mealtime interaction

Mealtime family interactions have been a popular setting for different approaches focusing on the organization of social interaction in general, on language socialization, and on socialization into the socio-cultural meaning of food and eating (see overview in Mondada 2009). During family mealtimes a common understanding of behavioral and communicative norms and values is displayed, negotiated, and contested (Pontecorvo *et al.* 2001; Ochs & Shohet 2006).

In the presence of smaller children, mealtime interaction is often linked to educational issues, such as how one should behave at the table and what one should eat, but also how one should speak (Blum-Kulka 1997; Ochs & Shohet 2006). These socialization practices have to be seen as an ongoing interactional negotiation between parents and children visible, for example, in the discursive construction of a certain form of behavior as deviating from the norm (Pontecorvo *et al.* 2001; Aronsson & Gottzén 2011).

If mealtimes are occasions for (language) socialization, in bilingual settings they also become opportunities for language maintenance. However, this latter

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**3** Blum-Kulka writes that ‘bilingual socialization means bilingual practices in the process of socialization as well as socialization toward balanced bilingualism’ (1987: 250) – though I would simply say ‘bilingualism,’ as ‘balanced bilingualism’ implies the notion of having equal competence in both languages, which refers to the ideology of monolingualism as the norm, while research has meanwhile demonstrated that bilingual repertoires are seldom balanced (Gadet & Varro 2006).

goal has to be balanced with other activities at the dinner table. Moreover, since the family dinner usually unites both parents and all children, language choice not only consists of each parent speaking their language with the children, but also involves the language(s) used between the spouses and in the family as a whole.

### 3.3 A micro-interactional approach to bilingual language use

Following the interactional focus of language socialization studies, language choice – and therefore language maintenance – needs to be examined as a local interactional achievement in which both parents and children are involved.

Such micro-interactional analyses can be found among the growing body of studies applying Conversation Analysis to the study of language alternation, i.e., proposing to analyze it by looking at sequential patterns and interactional cohesion (Auer 1984, 1998; Gafaranga 2000, 2001, 2005; Li 2005). These authors argue that language alternation cannot be fully explained by the situational (e.g., Fishman 2000; Blom & Gumperz 1989) or grammatical (see Poplack 2008) paradigms developed in previous research because it also fulfills interactional functions and its meaning depends on its sequential environment.

A CA-based study of language maintenance and bilingual language acquisition needs to take into account not only the parental input strategies, but also the children's responses, as well as the parents' reactions to 'inappropriate' language use by children (Döpke 1992; Lanza 2005, 2007; Mishina-Mori 2011). Gafaranga (2010, 2011) shows that the latter can be analyzed as repair movements.<sup>4</sup> Based on Jefferson's (1987) definition of embedded vs. exposed correction, he distinguishes between *embedded medium repair* and *explicit content repair*, which he views as strategies requesting the use of a specific language (or medium) (Gafaranga 2010). In the first case correction/repair is treated as 'a by-the-way occurrence in some ongoing course of talk' (Jefferson 1987: 95), whereas in the latter case, it is made relevant and suspends the ongoing activity. A divergent language choice can either be repaired implicitly through the use of another language in the next turn (embedded medium repair), or it can be made explicit through different discursive strategies, such as the repetition of the word or utterance in the other language.

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4 For a CA definition of repair, see Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks (1977) and Schegloff (2007).

## 4 Data collection

Following a linguistic-ethnographic approach,<sup>5</sup> field research was conducted in a small town in French-speaking Switzerland where a personal network provided relatively easy access to several couples composed of a Russian-speaking and a French-speaking (Swiss) partner respectively. There was frequent contact with these couples over a period of approximately ten months, from June 2009 to March 2010. During this time, interviews with eight Russian-speaking people<sup>6</sup> living with Swiss partners, some of whom were included in the interviews, were conducted. The interview included questions about the participants' language biographies as well as language use in the families. Seven of these eight couples also made recordings of their family interactions with or without the presence of the researcher. At the time of data collection, four of these families participated in a Russian-speaking playgroup, in which the researcher took part as a participant observer during the above-mentioned period of time.

This combination of different types of data (interviews, interactional data, and observation) provides a multi-faceted view on the question of language maintenance, linking it to socio-cultural conceptions of language and language use, as well as to daily communicative practices. The data discussed in this paper will focus on the latter by examining excerpts from dinner table recordings of three families with children aged between approximately 2;7 (2 years and 7 months) and 6;7.

## 5 Analysis: Negotiating behavior and language choice at the dinner table

The analysis focuses on three examples taken from audio recordings<sup>7</sup> made by three Russian-French speaking families. These recordings were made without the presence of the researcher. In the first two examples, the mother is Russian-

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<sup>5</sup> 'Linguistic ethnography generally holds that language and social life are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity' (Rampton *et al.* 2004: 2).

<sup>6</sup> All of them (seven women and one man) were born in the former Soviet Union and moved to Switzerland between 1994 and 2005. All of them declare Russian to be their first or dominant language.

<sup>7</sup> It is therefore not possible to include aspects of a multimodal analysis such as movements, gaze, gestures, and handling of objects.

speaking and the father French-speaking, and in the last example the reverse is the case. What the excerpts analyzed here all have in common is that they provide a local, interactional perspective on language maintenance. They were chosen according to the co-occurrence of both Russian and French in a sequence in which the main topic of talk is the children's behavior. Although the focus of the interaction is the definition and negotiation of the behavior under discussion, the analysis will show how the participants simultaneously negotiate language choice. The analysis also reveals that language choice can have different interactional functions as well as different degrees of interactional relevance.

## 5.1 Getting permission to have dessert

The first excerpt comes from a family of four: the parents Anastasija and Stéphane, and their two sons Denis (approx. 6;7 years old) and Dimitri (approx. 3;3). The sequence chosen is situated towards the end of a family dinner recording, when Dimitri (Dima) apparently comes to the table carrying something (it turns out to be dessert), and attracts the attention of his brother, while the parents are discussing some other issue. (See Appendix for transliteration conventions and the Introduction to this Issue for transcription conventions.)

### (1) Dessert

1. DEN: *on t'a permis? de prendre ça.*  
'Did you get permission to take this?'
2. DIM: *oui*  
'Yes.'
3. (1.8)
4. DEN: *maman tu lui as permis - ein?*  
'Mum, did you give him permission?'
5. (1.7)
6. ANA: *voobshche-to net, ty ne sprosila dima,*  
actually no you not asked dima  
'Actually no, you did not ask Dima.'
7. (0.4)
8. DEN: *ty ne sprosila dima,*  
you not asked dima  
'You did not ask Dima.'
9. DIM: *da=*  
'Yes.'
10. STE: *=(non mais i-)*  
'No but h-'
11. DEN: *n:et=*  
'No.'

12. STE: =c'est pas vrai, il a il a pris ça [( ) regard(er;ait)  
'That's not true, he has he has taken this look(;ed)
13. ANA: [du moment qu'on a  
'As long as we did not
14. rien dit donc voilà, .hh  
say anything so that's it.'
15. STE: donc oui tu [peux  
'So yes, you can.'
16. ANA: [( *vzjat'*) *tozhe* *denis*.  
'Take some as well Denis.'
17. (0.5)
18. DIM: *mOI* je *mOI* j'ai j'ai dit je peux? ( ) le dessert?  
'I said I said "Can I ( ) the dessert?"'
19. ANA: *ah? ty pravda vot èto skazal da?*  
you right this this said(2.P.sg.masc) yes  
'Ah, you really, that's what you said, yes?
20. STE: *mais on a pas ÉpréciséÉ ((laughs))*  
'But we did not specify.'
21. ANA: [aah,
22. STE: [(((laughs)) *É(il est chou)É il est malin, on a pas précisé de*  
'(He is cute) he is clever, we did not specify what
23. *quoi il s'agissait quand même pour le dessert.*  
it was supposed to be after all, the dessert.'
24. DIM?: ou-
25. (2.2)
26. ANA: *ladno*.  
'Fine.'
27. (0.5)
28. DEN: *en plus on - on t'a pas .h répondu alors,*  
'And also you didn't get an answer, so;'
29. (1.1)
30. STE: *ça joue? J'ai répondu? moi*  
'That's fine, I did answer.'

In this sequence, one of the children initiates the discussion of another child's behavior: by asking his younger brother if he had received permission to take the dessert (line 1), Denis positions himself as the one who knows how to behave and is therefore able to monitor the behavior of his younger brother. He takes on the 'generational position' (Aronsson & Gottzén 2011) of an adult towards his brother, while the parents seem to be occupied with some other activity. Since Dima responds affirmatively in line 2, the sequence could be considered closed here. But Denis, having been unsuccessful in pointing out his brother's perceived misbehavior, turns for support to a higher authority on the subject and reiterates his question; this time directing it at his mother (line 4). While Denis addresses his mother in French, Anastasija's turn in line 6,



answering Denis' question and then addressing Dima, is in Russian. She does not make Denis' language choice interactionally relevant, but corrects it indirectly, accomplishing an embedded medium repair. In line 8, Denis echoes Anastasija's turn addressed to his brother. By taking over his mother's voice he strengthens his own stance against his brother's. Together, Denis and Anastasija are involved in the definition of the appropriate procedure that has to be deployed in order to get dessert: first, one has to get permission and second, such permission can only be obtained by asking. Dima rejects the reproach, but linguistically aligns with his mother and brother (line 9).

In lines 10 and 12, Stéphane enters the discussion in French; it is not entirely clear whether he positions himself with or against Dima as his 'no but' may oppose Dima's as well as Anastasija's and Denis' stance. Denis then reinforces his accusation in line 11, directed at Dima, and perhaps also Stéphane, by speaking Russian and therefore staying aligned with his mother in terms of language choice and content. Stéphane's intervention prompts Anastasija to specify the procedure further, namely that the parents have to say something in order to make the permission valid (lines 13–14). Finally, the parents reach a joint conclusion and communicate it to their children; Stéphane by giving explicit permission to Dima in French (line 15), and Anastasija to Denis in Russian (line 16).

The sequence comes to a possible closure when Dima reopens the topic by claiming that he has followed the procedure since he did ask for permission, quoting his supposed previous utterance in French ('I have said: "Can I",' line 18). Now, Anastasija seems to remember the episode (line 19), thus confirming the correctness of Dima's claim. Again, she does not follow the child's language choice, French, but continues in Russian, implicitly correcting Dima's language choice.

It is now Stéphane who contests the valid fulfilment of the procedure evoked by Anastasija in lines 13–14 in declaring that it is not completed: just asking is not sufficient, there has to be a response given by the parents ('we did not specify,' line 20). Here we can observe a change of alliances, as Anastasija is now siding with Dima while Stéphane voices his doubts. In line 26, Anastasija attempts to close the sequence with a generic *ladno* ('fine'), which may refer to the precise procedure voiced by Stéphane as well as to the fact that in the prior sequence the parents did complete the procedure by allowing the children to take the dessert.

In line 28, Denis, still adhering to his monitoring role endorsed since the beginning of the sequence, reopens the topic by repeating the last part of the procedure, as indicated by his father, to his brother. This time he sides both linguistically and content-wise with his father. In this way, Denis exploits lan-

guage alternation to strategically position himself against his brother and to side with the parent who supports his stance, namely that Dima's behavior has indeed been inappropriate. By doing this, Denis also justifies his initial positioning as the one monitoring his brother's behavior. His father then closes the sequence for good by confirming that the procedure has been successfully executed (line 30).

In this excerpt the task of discussing Dima's behavior and the appropriate procedure to be followed in order to receive permission to get dessert are clearly the main interactional focus. Language choice is not explicitly addressed anywhere in the interaction. As we have seen, however, this does not mean that the instances of language alternation that have been discussed do not possess any interactional meaning. Through their respective language choices, both parents show a consistent linguistic pattern in interaction with their children as well as between themselves. Anastasija addresses her children consistently in Russian, Stéphane in French, while the couple communicate in French. The children's initiating moves are in French, as they address each other as well as their parents in this language. In lines 8–11, they seem to follow their mother's implicit language request for Russian. A closer look at these lines, however, shows that Denis' language choice is actually not an accommodation to his mother's language request, as he does not address her but his brother (whom he had addressed in French in line 1) while he echoes her utterance. Still, by taking over his mother's language choice and wording, he creates an alliance between her and himself against his brother. Similarly, he takes over his father's language choice when referring to his turn supporting his stance (line 28). Denis' language alternation in this sequence can be interpreted as an interactional strategy which allows him to align with either parent against his brother and which supports his initial positioning as his brother's supervisor. Denis is therefore not so much following his parents' medium requests as exploiting language choice in order to oppose his brother.

## 5.2 Eating fish in two languages

In this excerpt Julija, Nicolas, and their daughter Alina (3;5 years old) are eating dinner. Just before this sequence Alina was talking to her father in French about a bedtime story. Food is thematized for the first time in line 1 after Alina has changed topic and language by saying in Russian that she does not want to eat something on her plate. Her mother, Julija, responds in the next turn and maintains Alina's language choice, thus positioning herself as the addressee of Alina's turn:

(2) *Ryba* ('Fish')

1. ALI: (*mma*) **ja ne mogu est' ja tol'ko vot èto ljublju.**  
I not can eat I only here this like  
'I can't eat. I only like this here.'
2. JUL: **a pochemuž ty ryb(y;u) ne hochesh',**  
and why you fish not want  
'And why don't you want the fish?'
3. ALI: ((*breathing; sighing loudly*))
4. JUL: hm?
5. ALI: hmm **potomu chto (ja) ne ljublju**  
because that I not like  
'Hmm because I don't like (it).'
6. JUL: **ona vkusnaž rybaž**  
she<sup>8</sup> tasty fish  
'The fish is tasty.'
7. ALI: **ja (uzhe; j'ai) goûté**  
I (*already; I have*) tasted  
'I've (*already*) tried.'
8. JUL: **moi j'ai goûté ty poprobuj.**  
'Me, I have tried, you try.'
9. (1.9)
10. ALI: **net**  
'No.'
11. (2.6)
12. ALI: > **ne hochu.**<  
not want (1.p.sg)  
'(I) don't want (to).'
13. (1.2)
14. NIC: *aline t'aime bien ça d'habitude le poisson, (0.4) non?*  
'Aline you usually like fish, don't you?'
15. (1.8)
16. ALI: *mai:s moi je veux pAs*  
'But I don't want it.'
17. (3.2) ((*noise of cutlery on plate*))
18. JUL: (**ona**) **vkusnaja ( ) nichego da? po-moemu ( ).**  
she tasty nothingGEN<sup>9</sup> yes according to me  
'It's tasty, it's okay, isn't it? In my opinion.'
19. NIC: mhm, (0.4) .hhh (.) *ça va, °oui, c'est bien,*<sup>o</sup>  
'Mhm It's okay, yes, it's fine.'
20. JUL: *oui, elle a pas beaucoup de °goût de: poisson en fait*<sup>o</sup>  
'Yes, it does not have a strong fish taste, actually.'

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<sup>8</sup> The grammatical gender of the Russian word 'fish' is feminine.

<sup>9</sup> *Nichego* (the genitive form of 'nothing') is generally used to express a neutral or positive stance ('fine, okay').

In line 1 Alina provides an implicit reason for her refusal to eat some of her dinner, the reason being that she *only* likes something else on her plate. Through the provision of an account, Alina treats her refusal to eat as an accountable action. Julija's response (line 2) reveals the unwanted item as being fish and asks for another explanation, thus confirming the need to provide a valid reason for the refusal. By doing this, she treats Alina's initial account as insufficient and her eating behavior as 'possibly inappropriate or unwarranted' (Bolden & Robinson 2011: 94). Alina fails to give an answer, only sighing (line 3), and Julija reiterates her request for an account of Alina's behavior (line 4). Alina finally complies by stating that she does not like it. She uses the verb *ljubit'* ('like, love') rather than *nravit'sja* ('like, please'), thus stating that she does not like fish in general, not only the one on her plate. However, it is not clear whether she is aware of this distinction and, as becomes clear in the course of the interaction (line 14), she does usually eat fish. Alina's account is still not treated as convincing by Julija who states that the fish is tasty, thus challenging Alina's assessment. Alina counters this by asserting that she has tried the fish and is able to judge its taste (line 7).

While Russian has been used up to this point in the conversation by both participants, in line 7, Alina diverges from this established language choice. She starts her sentence in Russian (*ja* 'I'), followed by an unclear segment, which could either be the Russian *uzhe* ('already') or the French *j'ai* ('I have') and then the French word *goûté* ('tasted'). There is no hesitation that would point to a word search explaining the switch to French. The effect is a double divergence, linguistic and content-wise, from her mother.

Even if Julija does take up Alina's language choice in the next turn (line 8), she does it in such a way as to discredit Alina's claim as well as her language choice. With the utterance 'me, I have tried it' Julija establishes herself as the one able to judge the taste of the fish. At the same time, she also repeats Alina's bilingual utterance by transforming it into a complete sentence in French. By juxtaposing the French and Russian words for 'trying/tasting,' Julija further creates an implicit language lesson. Her switch back to Russian is an order ('you try!' in line 8) which implies that she does not believe Alina's claim that she has already tried it. She not only makes use of her authority on educational matters but also on matters of language choice as she reestablishes Russian as the language of interaction between her and her daughter.

Even if Alina refuses to comply with her mother's request (line 10 and 12: 'no, I don't want to') – thus implicitly confirming that she has not tried the fish – she aligns again with her linguistically, by using Russian. Her repeated use of delay in (verbal) responding (lines 9 and 11) is a marker of dispreferred moves (Sacks 1987), indicating that Alina is well aware that her responses are

not the ones expected by her mother. She therefore positions her mother as the authority in language choice as well as the epistemic authority (concerning the fact that she did not try the fish before refusing it), but she challenges her authority by not complying with the request to try the fish.

This sequence shows how the explicit negotiation of who is the legitimate judge concerning Alina's behavior and the taste of the fish coincides with the implicit negotiation of who is the one choosing the language to be used. By taking up French and switching back to Russian, Julija re-adjusts her daughter's language choice through repetition, and without addressing it explicitly within the interaction.

In line 14, Nicolas intervenes in French. By continuing the topic of the preceding talk, he shows that he has followed the previous negotiation in Russian and thus demonstrates his bilingual competence. At the same time, by continuing the discussion about Alina's behavior started by his wife, he constructs it as a joint parental task. He moves the argumentation from the local here-and-now behavior to a more general level: the fact that Alina usually likes fish renders Alina's reason provided for not eating the fish invalid. Again, Alina delays her response (line 15) but keeps her stance, continuing to challenge parental authority. Her response ('but I don't want [it],' line 16) does not invalidate the fact that she usually likes fish, but asserts that she does not want it on that occasion.

The parents stop insisting on Alina eating the fish, but they continue their co-construction of a joint parental stance on the topic (lines 18–20). Julija comments on the taste of the fish in Russian (line 18). Nicolas delays his response by first uttering a confirming *mhm*, then pausing and finally answering in French (line 19). As a reaction to Nicolas' indication of 'trouble' and his subsequent language choice, Julija switches to French in line 20, thus accommodating to her husband's language choice. However, she does not repeat her previous turn, originally formulated in Russian, but specifies in French what 'good taste' for fish means in this context. With this move she treats Nicolas' 'trouble' not as a problem of understanding Russian, but as a matter of interactional language choice pattern.

This sequence (lines 18–20) shows, on the one hand, how the parents' common language is locally negotiated. It displays Nicolas' competence in Russian since he is able to react appropriately to Julija's turn, but it also shows his implicit correction of her language choice. By accommodating to his language choice in the following turn, Julija follows his implicit request for language change, thus establishing French as their common language for this sequence. On the other hand, the sequence also constitutes an evaluation of Alina's behavior as Julija seeks confirmation from her husband that the taste of the

fish is acceptable and then specifies what kind of taste would provide a valid reason for rejecting it. The parents co-construct their common understanding of the taste of the fish and an implicit agreement on Alina's misbehavior, while simultaneously demonstrating their bilingual competences as well as establishing their common language of interaction.

While the topic of this episode is Alina's eating behavior, it also demonstrates how parental authority as well as language choice and bilingual competence are constructed and displayed in interaction. Alina and her parents define food refusal interactionally as something that needs to be accounted for and as needing the approval of the parents. In order to receive such an approval, one has to be able to demonstrate that one has tried the food in question before refusing it. Food can only be legitimately refused if the taste proves to be potentially not good for a child. Alina's refusal, however, is not legitimate and not accepted as such, even if the parents do abandon their insistence on having her try the food.

The interactional definition of appropriate behavior described above goes hand-in-hand with the co-construction of parental authority. The father takes up the discussion of behavior initiated by the mother and thus backs her stance. Even if their attempt to make Alina behave according to their wishes fails, the couple reach a shared understanding of the situation.

Finally, throughout the sequence, specific language choice patterns are revealed by participants and divergent language choice is negotiated. Alina's deviation from the established interactional language choice, Russian, is oriented to by her mother, and the previous language choice pattern is reestablished. Nicolas addresses Alina in French, which she also uses in her responses. Finally, there is an instance of language negotiation between the spouses, in which French is established as the locally valid language choice.

### 5.3 Getting dessert ... in the right language

The last excerpt I would like to discuss is from a third family: Brigitte, Mihail (Misha) and their two sons, Konstantin (Kostja) (5;1) and Alexej (2;7). In the sequence preceding the excerpt chosen for analysis, the parents have argued a lot with Alexej to make him finish his dinner before Brigitte begins to distribute dessert:

(3) *Ja tozhe* ('me too')

1. BRI: *qui veut du gâteau à la crème.*  
'Who wants some cream gateau ((local speciality))?'
2. (.)

3. KON: *m[oi (je veu:x)*  
'Me (I want some).'
4. ALE: *[mOi*  
'Me.'
5. KON: *moi je veux leur gâteau*  
'Me I want their cake.'
6. BRI: *misha t'en veux aussi?*  
'Misha, you want some too?'
7. MIH: *mhm nemnozhko=*  
'Mhm a little.'
8. KON: *=moi aussi*  
'Me too.'
9. (1.2)
10. ALE: *et moi aussi*  
'And me too.'
11. BRI: *alors konstantin finis ton assiette, aleksej il a fini,*  
'Then Konstantin empty your plate. Aleksej, he has finished.'
12. MIH: *(nado) Aleks- kostja nado govorit' ja tozhe.*  
has to Aleks- Kostja has to say-INF I too  
'(Have to) Aleks- Kostja you have to say "me too".'
13. (.)
14. KON: *ja °to( )°*  
'Me (too) ((mumbled))'
15. MIH: *aleksej skazhi ja tozhe.*  
'Aleksej, say: me too.'
16. ALE: *atoz*  
'(Me too) ((mumbled))'
17. MIH: *hnn,*
18. BRI: *E(sacrée) motivationE ((laughs))*  
'(Damned) motivation.'
19. MIC: *((laughs))*

In this excerpt Brigitte asks who wants to have some cake and both children respond positively (lines 3–5). Brigitte then asks Mihail the same question, and he also responds affirmatively (line 7). The children reiterate their wish to have some cake, adding 'too,' as in Brigitte's question to Mihail (lines 8 and 10). Brigitte then urges Konstantin to finish his dinner (line 11), just as she had previously done with Aleksej. By doing so, she links the distribution of dessert not only to her sons' wish to have cake, but also to the pre-condition of having eaten up dinner first.

In line 12, Mihail intervenes with a different purpose. By instructing his sons to say 'me too' in Russian, he changes the interactional focus from dinner table behavior to language choice, explicitly correcting the children's previous language choice in lines 8 and 10. With this move, Mihail makes language choice interactionally relevant. While Brigitte establishes emptying the plates as

a pre-condition for getting cake (line 11), Mihail adds an additional requirement through a language lesson; he exploits the children's desire to have some cake to make them utter a phrase in Russian.

Brigitte's comment in line 18 about the motivation to speak Russian and the parents' subsequent laughter further indicate that this sequence is not to be taken too seriously, i.e., repeating words in Russian is not the usual activity needed for getting dessert as the preceding negotiation indicates. Still, Mihail succeeds in making the children repeat the suggested phrase in Russian.

Contrary to the previous two excerpts, in this sequence, we witness the move from interactional needs and educational tasks to an explicit language lesson, with the explicit request to use Russian suspending the ongoing activity. The dinner table interaction is exploited here to make language maintenance the interactional focus.

## 6 Concluding discussion

This article has proposed approaching language maintenance as a form of bilingual language socialization at the dinner table. A sequential analysis has allowed the reconstruction of the interactional definition of behavioral norms as well as the negotiation of language choice in the process.

The analysis has shown that language choice can be made relevant within interaction to different degrees, ranging from implicit language shift requests, or embedded language correction (excerpts [1] and [2]), to explicit language lessons (excerpt [3]). Language alternation fulfills locally strategic interactional functions, such as displaying authority (excerpt [2]) or creating alliances (excerpt [1]), but it also reveals each family's interactional language choice pattern (sentence structure).

Language maintenance in binational-bilingual families can be conceived of as an interactional task to be achieved in everyday activities. Bilingual parents are confronted with the complex task of combining their language choice strategies with other educational goals, such as monitoring the children's behavior at the dinner table. While language maintenance may sometimes become the focus of interaction, in most instances it is accomplished through implicit strategies of language negotiation. The examples above show that bilingual parenting not only consists of providing appropriate linguistic input, but also of being able to switch languages to co-construct behavioral norms and joint parental authority across both languages. Likewise, language maintenance is not only about transmitting a specific language, but mostly about engaging in bilingual language socialization.



## Appendix

### Transliteration Conventions

Cyrillic	Latin	Cyrillic	Latin	Cyrillic	Latin
а	a	л	l	ч	ch
б	b	м	m	ш	sh
в	v	н	n	щ	shch
г	g	о	o	ъ	"
д	d	п	p	ы	y
е	e	р	r	ь	'
ё	jo	т	t	э	è
ж	zh	с	s	ю	ju
з	z	у	u	я	ja
и	i	ф	f		
й	j	х	h		
к	k	ц	c		

## Bionote

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